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Current Educational Policy in Italy : A Focus on Language Learning and CLIL

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Current Educational Policy in Italy: A Focus on Language Learning and CLIL

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1. Introduction

“Change is the only constant” is the incipit of the 19th lesson Harari (2018) provides among the 21 lessons for 21st century, referring to education. Our society is ever changing and growing, as a “liquid modernity” (Baumann, 2000), therefore, education must keep up with current developments and changes as well. The following examples of policies will be described bearing in mind the need to innovate and change Italian schools, abolishing the traditional model of schooling. This is one of the challenges Italian educational policies are facing and, as CLIL has been considered by the European Commission as a driver for innovation, its introduction as compulsory into the upper secondary school curriculum may help reach this goal.

2. A Snapshot of European Educational Policy

A wide range of inputs have recently been provided by the European Commission in the field of language learning and teaching. One of the latest examples is the new Key Competences Framework (2018), shown in Figure 1. Competence in the mother tongue, as it was mentioned in the Key Competences Framework dated 2006 became “literacy” in the 2018 version, expanding the perspective, in order to include not only the first language, but any other communication code (digital literacy, visual literacy etc.). Competence in the foreign languages mentioned in 2006 became “languages” in 2018, referring to a multilingual and multicultural perspective, including different language varieties, with a special focus on plurilingualism.

The Council Recommendation on a comprehensive approach to the teaching and learning of languages (2019) relaunched Barcelona objectives (two foreign

languages in addition to one's own mother tongue) and highlighted the concept of “language awareness”, as a transversal dimension to any subject of the curriculum.

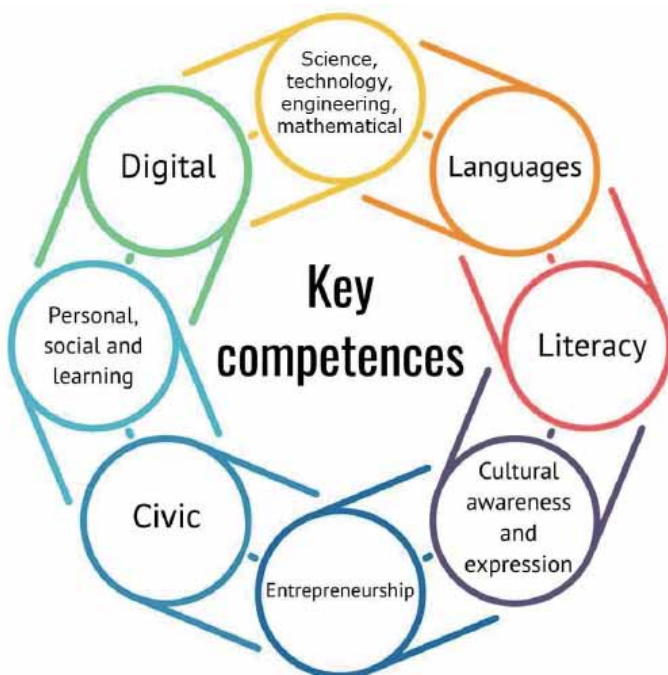


Figure 1. Key Competences Framework

Digital competence also plays a crucial role for 21st century learners and was specifically addressed by the recent “Companion Volume to the Common European Framework for Languages (CEFR) with new descriptors”, issued by the Council of Europe in 2018, collecting new descriptors and new indicators, after a long period of consultation with a wide range of stakeholders (universities, research centres, language schools, ministries etc.). One of these new descriptors is “online interaction”, considered crucial for our students, constantly exposed to a screen when communicating with peers. A pilot project on online interaction was carried out in Italy by the Ministry of Education and INDIRE in 2018, which involved a school network fostering the use of digital tools and social networks for interacting online among peers in English.

3. A Snapshot of the Italian Educational System

Starting from the graph supplied by OECD (see Figure 2), the contribution will

mainly focus on primary and secondary education, addressed by INDIRE for the majority of projects and research. INDIRE has been cooperating a great deal with the Ministry of Education through a large number of projects, such as the monitoring research project on one of the most important latest reforms, the so-called “Moratti Reform”.

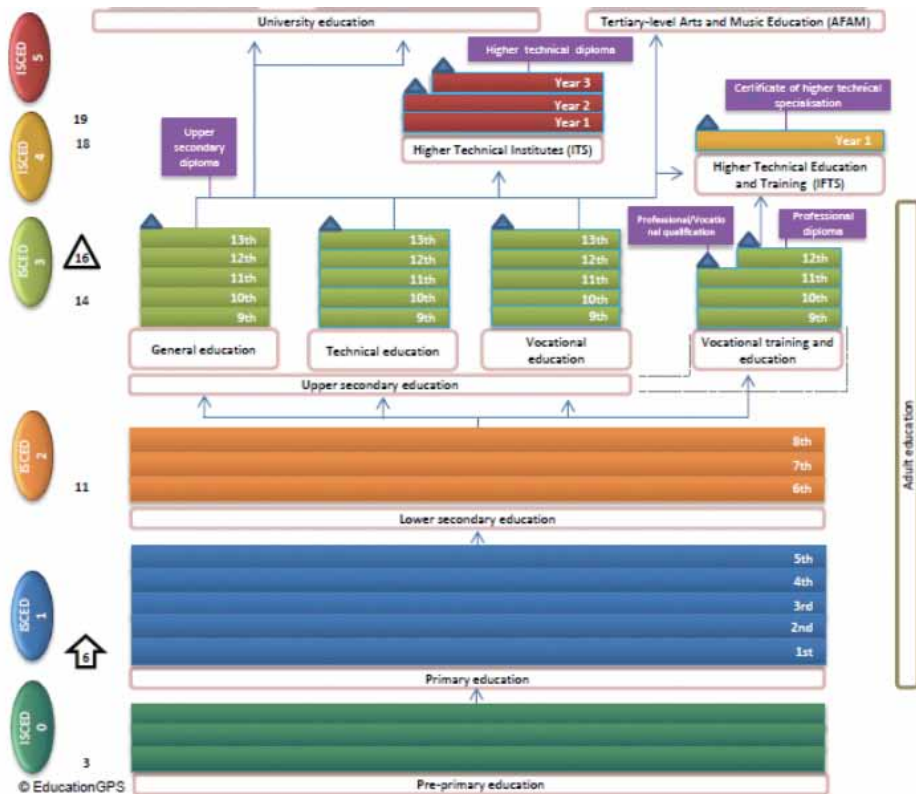


Figure 2. Italian School System*

As far as foreign languages are concerned, English is compulsory from primary school and often introduced in pre-primary, to upper secondary school. A second foreign language is provided only in lower secondary school, choosing mainly among French, German and Spanish (Fig. 3).

CLIL is mandatory in the fifth year of all upper secondary schools (Decrees 88 and 89 dated 2010), and the Ministry of Education issued a document titled “Transitory Norms”, including measures and suggestions for a gradual and soft implementation

* (Source: OECD (2012-13), “Italy: Overview of the education system”, OECD Education GPS), http://gpseducation.oecd.org/Content/MapOfEducationSystem/ITA/ITA_2011_EN.pdf.

of CLIL in the school curricula.

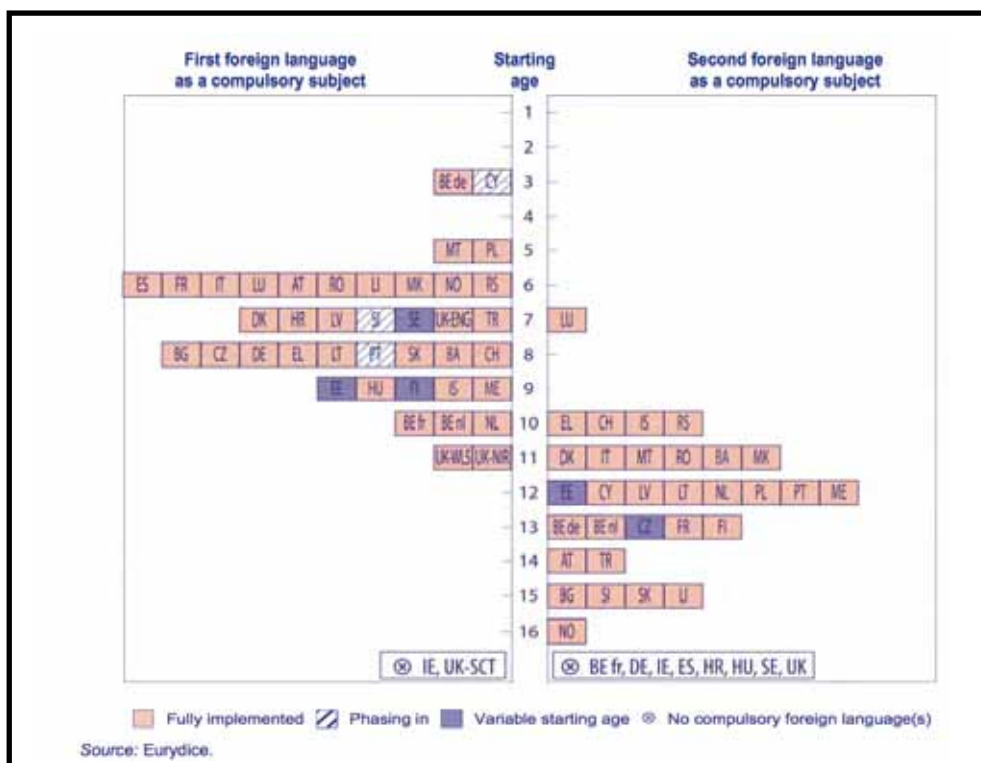


Figure 3. Languages Taught at School, Eurydice, 2017, p. 30

4. Latest Italian Reforms

Figure 4 summarizes the latest reforms implemented in Italy with the aim to innovate and improve the school system in general and language learning/teaching in particular. In 2010 CLIL became compulsory in upper secondary schools and standards for languages were set for the different school levels, in particular for English:

- A1 at the end of primary school
- A2 at the end of lower secondary school
- B1 after the first two years of upper secondary school
- B2 at the end of upper secondary school.

In 2013 the National Evaluation System was approved after a long ministerial process: schools must undergo an internal process of self-evaluation, through the

use of certain tools (“RAV”, which refers to a self-evaluation report) and later they will receive an inspection from an external evaluation team, interweaving internal and external evaluation. The aim is to improve the different aspects of schools, such as teaching models, infrastructure, learning outcomes etc. The design of improvement is included in a document called “Improvement Plan”, collecting all the initiatives and projects that the school is going to implement in order to overcome the weaknesses identified during the internal and external evaluation.

DPR 88-89/2010	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - CLIL <u>compulsory in all upper secondary schools</u> - <u>Standards for students' language competences (A2; B1; B2 in the first foreign language)</u>
DPR 80/2013	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - National Evaluation System - <u>School evaluation (internal/external)</u> - <u>School improvement plan</u>
Law 107/2015	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <u>National Digital Plan</u> - <u>Work-based traineeships</u> - <u>CLIL recommended since primary school</u> - <u>National Teacher Training Plan</u>

Figure 4. Latest Italian Reforms

In 2015 another important reform was implemented, impacting schools as far as the following dimensions are concerned:

- Digital dimension: money was invested in infrastructure and ICT training
- Work-based traineeship was introduced as compulsory in all upper secondary schools
- National Teacher Training Plan: teacher training became compulsory and structural
- CLIL is recommended from primary school, as starting from the last year of upper secondary school is not sufficiently beneficial full stop.

5. Snapshot of CLIL

CLIL in Italy was highlighted and appreciated by the European Commission in the

aforementioned Council Recommendation on a comprehensive approach to the teaching and learning of languages (2019), where the following “case study” from Eurydice Brief (2017) was reported (Figure 5):

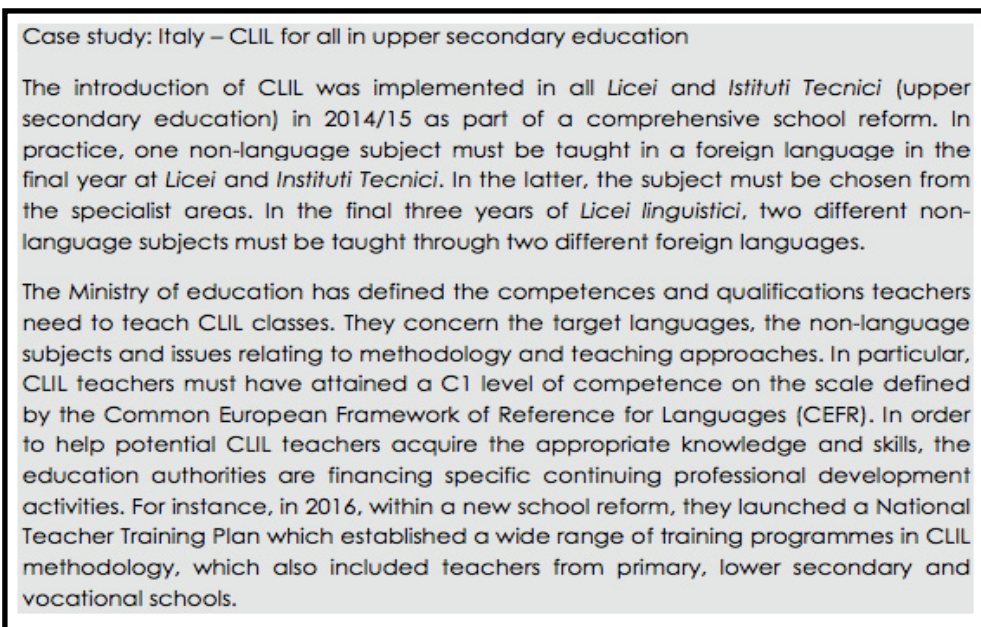


Figure 5. Case Study from Eurydice Brief (2017, p. 14)

In Italy the CLIL teacher is a subject teacher (Coyle et al., 2010; Langé, Cinganotto, 2014; Cinganotto, 2018; Cinganotto, Cuccurullo, 2019) teaching either scientific or humanistic subjects, who has gained a C1 level in the target language and the CLIL methodological course delivered by one of the universities selected by the Ministry of Education: a very demanding pathway for a middle-aged teacher, who has to cope with his/her job and family life, as well as studying. The so-called “CLIL teams” made up of subject teachers, foreign language teachers and any other language experts are encouraged by the Ministry of Education, as the exchange of experiences and expertise may be an added value for CLIL. Most popular subjects for CLIL, according to the latest surveys on “*Licei Linguistici*” are: History, Natural Sciences, Physics, Philosophy (Figure 6). In fact, it is up to the school leader, in agreement with the staff of teachers, to choose the subject for CLIL, apart from technical schools where the CLIL subject is by law the specialization and technical subject.

2012-2013		%
1	Storia	32,03
2	Sc. naturali	18,78
3	Fisica	13,7
4	Filosofia	9,15
5	Matematica	8,28
6	Storia dell'arte	7,41
7	Sc. Motorie	4,79
8	Altri insegn.	4,58

2014-2015		%
1	Storia	32,72
2	Sc. Naturali	17,82
3	Fisica	17,21
4	Storia dell'arte	10,48
5	Matematica	8,76
6	Filosofia	5,88
7	Sc. Motorie	3,80
8	Altri insegn.	3,57

Figure 6. Most Popular Subjects for CLIL

The EU-funded National Operational Programme 2014-20, includes measures to improve educational equity, quality, lifelong learning, links between school and work, technical and vocational education, education infrastructure, administrative and institutional capacity and resource management. Specific fundings are provided for language and CLIL courses both for teachers and students.

6. Innovative learning environments

As already mentioned, one of the main aims of INDIRE and MIUR in recent years has been fostering innovation at school, considering the school from a holistic perspective, in all its dimensions. Some of the objectives are:

- creating learning environments that support the success of school leaders and teachers
- reshaping and innovating teaching practices
- enhancing digital innovation and skills in schools

In 2014 INDIRE launched a movement, called “Avanguardie Educative” that now involves more than 800 schools and is aimed at enhancing innovative ideas implemented by schools from a “bottom-up” perspective, guiding more and more teachers and school leaders towards innovation. Figure 7 shows the gallery of innovative ideas fostered by the “Avanguardie Educative” movement.

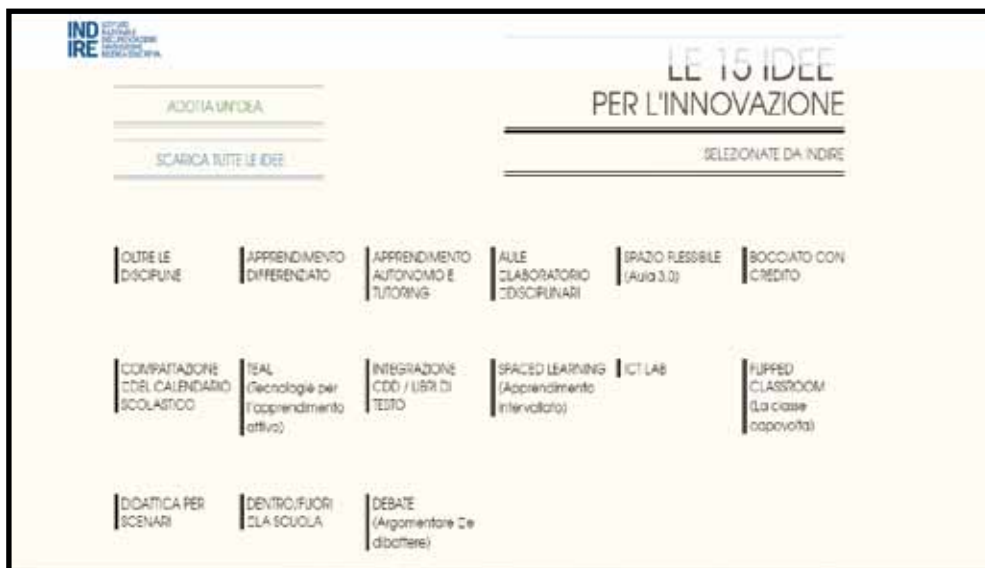


Figure 7. The Movement of “Avanguardie Educative”

7. Teacher Training Needs

The professional profile of a teacher has been widely investigated both at European (Kelly, Grenfell, 2004; Newby et al., 2007) and national level (Diadori, 2010), highlighting a wide range of competences every teacher should develop: subject knowledge, methodological competences, transversal skills, digital skills etc. That is why training pathways play a key role for Italian teachers' professional development. According to TALIS findings (2013), Italian teachers had low participation in professional development activities, despite reporting a comparatively greater need for them (75.4% of Italian teachers reported having taken professional development, compared to the TALIS average of 88.4%). Law 107/2015 made in-service training mandatory, permanent and structural: teachers are required to take part in professional development initiatives planned at school level and included in the triennial School Development Plan. Such initiatives need to be in step with national priorities, school improvement targets and the specific training needs of every teacher. This represents a revolution for teachers, who were not obliged to attend any training courses in the past. Now training activities have become an integral part of the learning pathway and the teacher has to select the specific initiative to attend in accordance with the school needs and mission, not only following his/her own preferences.

8. Challenges in Language Education

Among future challenges in education and with reference to language education in particular, the following issues can be mentioned:

- *Secondary school CLIL teachers' level of competence in the foreign language (C1)*. It is a very demanding level, as Italian subject teachers were not initially obliged to learn a foreign language, but only to master their subject knowledge;
- *Primary school English teacher training*. Official primary school teacher training in English delivered by INDIRE on behalf of MIUR stopped some years ago and schools have recently organized themselves autonomously and often differently from school to school and from town to town. New training initiatives would be needed, aiming at B2 level, as the B1 sufficient now to teach at primary level is not enough;
- *CLIL teacher profile at primary and lower secondary level*. So far only the CLIL teacher profile for upper secondary school has been defined and regulated: we are still waiting for indications and instructions from the Ministry about the primary and lower secondary CLIL teacher profile;
- *Varieties of English (ELF, ELFE, EWC, etc.)*. Standard English seems to be the only mastery of the language teachers have and teach in a language class: the other varieties are pretty much ignored; in particular ELF (English as a Lingua Franca) is completely ignored, while it could stimulate students' fluency, decreasing Krashen's affective filter.

With reference to this topic, Santipolo comments:

Se da un lato molte sono le strade che si potrebbero percorrere per sviluppare competenze relative alla variabilità della lingua inglese, non vi è dubbio che il primo passo sia la sensibilizzazione verso la tematica. Essa infatti in Italia è ancora molto marginale. (Santipolo, 2016, p. 189)

We should inform teachers about other varieties of English, which can be fully legitimised instead of being seen as mistakes to be ignored and constantly corrected.

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Abstract

This contribution provides some snapshots of current educational policies in Italy, with particular reference to language learning and CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning), also considering the wider European scenario. Some of the latest reforms in Italy will be mentioned, in particular CLIL, which is considered by the European Commission to be a case study, as it is compulsory in all upper secondary schools. Some references will be made to teacher training needs and how the Ministry of Education is trying to meet them. Collaboration projects between INDIRE (National Institute for Documentation, Innovation and Educational Research) and MIUR (Italian Ministry of Education, University and Research) are highlighted.

Keywords: CLIL, educational policy, upper secondary education, teacher training